

The eighteenth century, then was one experiencing a rapid social development. Under the influence of coffee houses, and the revival of interest in learning, prose distinguished by elegant formalism in keeping with an elaborate social code prevailed.

The sixteenth century is characterized by intellectual liberty, social contentment, unbounded patriotism, and enthusiasm. England was at peace; discoveries and explorations awakened ambitions, hopes, imaginations; Elizabeth's policies quieted for the time much religious bigotry and hatred; foreign literature was quickening the spirits of English writers. During the entire century, England was exceedingly sensitive to foreign influence: one foreign treatise or another was constantly inspiring Elizabethan writers. Castiglione and Guevara, Montemayor, and Mendoza, each in his own way, exerted his influence, which was impelling and directive. But the English writer of the sixteenth century was ready to express himself originally and naturally. The foreign influence only stimulated him to action, for the concept was quite his own. The age was primarily an age of poetry.¹

The period is known as the English Renaissance or the Age of Elizabeth. The court was easily the supreme element in the national life. Elizabeth's insatiable love of pleasure, her constant high spirits, and her enthusiasm and interest in enjoying life, made gaiety and light-heartedness prevail; for her court was gay and light-hearted, and her court was everywhere, since she travelled here and there in the country to "be known and seen of all men."

1. Cambridge History of English Literature, vol. III.